

My Meeting With A Google Executive

On Tuesday morning this week, I met Lauren Brown, a marketing executive with Google, one of the world's wealthiest digital technology companies. She contacted me late last week and we agreed to meet Tuesday morning in the law office of my longtime friend and lawyer Graham Catlett. I asked Graham and Charles Bolden, my campaign manager, to join me in that meeting.

After we exchanged the customary pleasantries, Ms. Brown stated that she wanted to express Google's hope that Google and Pulaski County could work together if I am elected County Judge during the upcoming general election on November 3. I thanked her for being willing to meet with me and expressed my concerns about the likely impact of Google's Port of Little Rock data center on the rural predominantly black-owned and settled unincorporated Sweet Home community. Graham Catlett asked about the likely impact of Google's electrical power service on the utility bills that he and other customers of Entergy are and will be paying.

Ms. Brown's responses to our questions were, if anything, disquieting.

She told us, repeatedly, that Google has not developed a plan it can share. She told us that Google is in the process of rethinking how it will position the proposed data center on the hundreds of acre site it acquired through a subsidiary, Willowbend Capital, LLC. She tried to persuade us that Little Rock and Sweet Home would be pleased with Google's eventual data center. Ms. Brown used the term "iterative process" to describe how Google plans and builds data centers. However, Ms. Brown would not tell us when Google will be able to produce diagrams, schematic models, or even a structural rendering of the data center it plans to build in the Port of Little Rock.

My response to Ms. Brown as we sat in Graham Catlett's office was that her statements "strained credibility". Graham's response was more pointed: "I don't believe you."

Ms. Brown asked us more than once if we accused her of lying. Graham and I emphatically denied that we were making that accusation.

However, we each told Ms. Brown that her explanation does not square with our experience about how building projects work. As I said to Ms. Brown, if one of my former law clients told me that it was going to make similar statements during testimony in a legal case I would have told that client that no juror or jury in Arkansas would find that testimony plausible. Why? Because Google's position flies in the face of common sense and experience.

Anyone with common sense – let alone basic experience in real estate development - knows that a developer does not purchase hundreds of acres of rural land adjacent to an industrial park without a plan for what will be built on it.

Anyone with common sense – let alone basic experience in real estate development – knows that no developer purchases hundreds of acres of rural land adjacent to an industrial park and petitions to have that rural land annexed to the City of Little Rock as part of the Port of Little Rock industrial park without a plan for the industrial building it will build.

Anyone with common sense – let alone basic experience in real estate development – knows that no developer (in this instance Willowbend Capital, LLC) negotiates with the City of Little Rock and “several” other unnamed “entities” “in a way that induces the City of Little Rock Board of Directors to authorize the Mayor and City Clerk of Little Rock to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) about a development project to be built and operated in the Little Rock Port” without a plan for that project.

- Without a plan for what the project will ultimately produce.
- Without a plan for how the developed project will be powered and watered.
- Without a plan for how much dirt will be excavated for projected buildings on the site to be developed.
- Without a plan about anything else related to developing the project.

That’s why I told Ms. Brown that her responses to us “strained credibility” and why Graham Catlett told her, “I don’t believe you” after she looked us in the eye, smiled, and told us that Google doesn’t have a plan for what the City of Little Rock’s Board of Directors understood a more than a year ago world will be a \$1 billion dollar data center in the Port of Little Rock.

And that is why I politely walked Ms. Brown to the elevator and pointedly declined her invitation to attend a meeting with Google’s Little Rock engineering “team” later this week. I knew then that whatever Google’s team would say during that “meeting” would probably be another dose of the pitch Ms. Brown made to Graham Catlett, Charles Bolden and me. As I told Ms. Brown during our meeting, “I don’t wear a Boo-Boo The Fool T-shirt.”

I expressed my concerns about the land use impacts of the Google data center on the people and land in Sweet Home during the June 2 Little Rock Board of Directors meeting. I repeated those concerns to the Pulaski County Quorum Court but focused on the impacts of the planned AVAIO Leo artificial intelligence (AI) campus that AVAIO Digital intends to build on 760 acres of rural land it acquired outside Wrightsville, another predominantly black populated area that neighbors Sweet Home. during the public comment period after the Quorum Court’s June 9 agenda meeting.

On May 26, Little Rock Chamber of Commerce, Entergy, and Central Arkansas Water executives held a press conference atop the Central Arkansas Library Building to tout the planned Google and AVAIO digital technology developments.

A flyer distributed to attendees at that press conference contains the following statement: “Google has acknowledged the purchase of land in Little Rock under subsidiary Willowbend Capital LLC. Willowbend Capital LLC entered a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the City of Little Rock in April of 2025 to develop a \$1 billion, 300,000 square-foot light industrial data center... In subsequent filings with the Army Corps of Engineers, a site plan showcased five 300,000 square foot buildings, which represents a significant expansion beyond the initial \$1 billion investment.”

But on June 9, two weeks after that May 26 press conference, Google’s Lauren Brown looked Graham Catlett, Charles Bolden, and me in the eye and repeatedly said that Google doesn’t have a plan that anyone can see concerning that development.

On May 26, LR Chamber of Commerce leader Jay Chesshir, City of Little Rock, Pulaski County, Port of Little Rock, Entergy, Central Arkansas Water, and Little Rock Water Reclamation Authority leaders distributed a handout titled “Google Data Center Fact Sheet.” It contained the following statement in a paragraph titled “**Jobs:** At full buildout, there will be hundreds of jobs on site. A typical data center will need people in a series of different job classifications both during the construction phase and actual operation, including plumbers, pipe fitters, electricians, project engineers, fiber splicers, fiber techs, directional drill operators, line workers, engineer technicians, control technicians, data center technicians, and operations technicians, among others.”

However, the April 2025 MOU between Willowbend Capital LLC (Google’s subsidiary) and the City of Little Rock contains the following sentence in the first paragraph. “Approximately 50 new high-quality jobs will be created as a result of the Project.”

Not “hundreds of jobs.”

50 means tens of jobs.

As I told Lauren Brown, I do not and have never lived in a world where sophisticated business executives purchase hundreds of acres of rural land on which they plan to build an industrial facility at a projected value of \$1 billion without any plan a year later about how the facility will operate and where it will be sited on the land they purchased.

I support economic development and welcome transparent truthful conversations about potential and existing development projects. But I refuse to believe that one of the largest companies in the world doesn’t have a plan for a \$1 billion data center that could require hundreds of megawatts of electrical power to operate, huge backup generators

in case of power shutdowns, extraordinary amounts of water for cooling computer servers, among many other things.

Before Little Rock permits large scale industrial users such as the Google data park in the Port of Little Rock and before Pulaski County permits the AVAIO Leo AI campus outside Wrightsville to tear up rural land, lock in massive electrical power grid demands, trigger infrastructure upgrades on our water supply and wastewater treatment systems, our roads, and our public safety systems, Little Rock and Pulaski County should require that developers first openly come to us and disclose those impacts.

That's not radical. That's basic land use planning.

Google knows this. AVAIO Digital knows it.

The City of Little Rock and Pulaski County should act like we know it and insist that Google and AVAIO Digital behave according to regulations and procedures we establish. And we should have enough sense to take the time needed to develop that regulatory and procedural framework.

Pulaski County and Little Rock should welcome economic development projects that honor our people, natural resources, and our posterity. We should never allow ourselves to become captives to people who are more concerned with machines, computer servers, property rights, and profits than about the people, land, air, water, and wildlife we are blessed to call our neighbors and home.

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